SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN CLERICAL WORKERS IN THE WORKPLACE

By

ROHANI BINTI ABDUL RAHIM

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Mei 2005
DEDICATION

To

Allah the Almighty for the inspiration

My Dearest husband

Junaidi Abu Bakar, Ph.D.

Our precious children

Aiman Aizuddin
Afiq Afham
Athir Amani
Alya Qistina
Akhtar Arif

My late parents

Allahyarhamah Fatimah Zaman
Allahyarham Abdul Rahim Hassan

Al-Fatihah
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Mei 2005

Chairperson : Professor Hjh. Maimunah binti Ismail, PhD

Faculty : Educational Studies

The issues on sexual harassment caught the national interest in the year 1999. The media frequently highlighted them particularly those happened at workplace. Women became the targeted victims in male dominated workplace and in sexual harassment tolerance environment. Many of those experiences went unreported and they suffered in silence for fear of retaliation and humiliation. In the legal perspective, it is essential that the meaning of sexual harassment be determined beforehand.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the meaning of sexual harassment as perceived by the victims? (2) What is the level of awareness among the victims on sexual harassment? (3) How are the victims harassed and what are the types of sexual harassment experienced? (4) What are the causes of sexual
harassment and how do these causes facilitate sexual harassment? (5) How are the victims affected by the sexual harassment experienced? and, (6) How do the victims cope with sexual harassment and why do they choose such means?

It uses a qualitative case study approach on ten respondents. They were selected using the purposive sampling and the snowball technique. They were chosen based on criteria, that are: (a) female clerical workers (b) had experienced sexual harassment (c) the sexual harassment occurred at workplace (d) they were employed earlier either in the private or corporate body, and (e) they were more than 20 years old. The respondents were interviewed to draw data based on their experiences.

The findings of this study revealed that the victims perceived sexual harassment as unwanted behavior, sexual and sensitive in nature and gender related. There were two levels of awareness found, that are the previous and the recent awareness. The three types of sexual harassment identified by the victims were verbal request, verbal comments and non-verbal display. The causes of sexual harassments were viewed as the existence of opportunities, sexual tolerance environment, the harassers attitude and the victims personality, power and gender relations, and preplanned intention. Some of the effects mentioned by the victims were psychological consequences, changes in personality, health and social related problems and unsatisfactory work life. Finally, the study found that the victims used some coping strategies to deal with sexual harassments they experienced. That are, social support, self-coping, conduct informal
complaint and psychological coping.

The conclusions of the study are as follows: Firstly, there is difficulty in identifying the meaning of sexual harassment. Secondly, there are two levels of awareness about sexual harassment among clerical workers that is, previous and present awareness. Thirdly, the victims were sensitive to sexual harassments that were explicit and sexual in nature. Fourthly, ‘opportunities’ are regarded as the catalysts that cause sexual harassment among clerical women. Fifthly, emotional psychological and work related factors are most affected by sexual harassment victims and finally, there are problems coping with sexual harassment.

The study provides some significant implications. The victims became empowered and their knowledge on sexual harassment was enhanced, after going through the interview sessions that eventually generated awareness on their sexual harassment experiences. In the legal field, data from the study established similar meanings to the “reasonable women standard” used to decide cases in court. This is rather unique and creative because the court uses the layperson standard to decide on the meanings of “sexual harassment”. In the organization, greater liabilities were imposed on the employers to ensure the workplaces are free from sexual harassment practices. Future research on every aspect of sexual harassment practices can be conducted in various fields such as social, legal and educational studies. This is because at present there are very limited studies conducted on sexual harassment at workplace in Malaysia.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

GANGGUAN SEKSUAL TERHADAP PEKERJA PERKERANIAN WANITA DI TEMPAT KERJA

Oleh

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Soalan kajian ialah: (1) Apakah makna gangguan seksual mengikut persepsi mangsa? (2) Apakah tahap kesedaran mangsa berkaitan gangguan seksual? (3) Bagaimanakah mangsa diganggu dan apakah jenis gangguan seksual yang dialami? (4) Apakah punca vi
gangguan seksual dan bagaimanakah punca-punca ini menggalakkan terjadinya
gangguan seksual? (5) Bagaimanakah mangsa menerima kesan daripada gangguan
seksual yang dialami? dan, (6) Bagaimanakah mangsa mengupaya terhadap gangguan
tersebut dan kenapa mereka memilih cara tersebut? Kajian kes ini menggunakan
pendekatan kualitatif terhadap sepuluh orang responden. Mereka dipilih dengan
menggunakan persampelan bertujuan dan secara teknik 'snowball', berdasarkan kriteria
tertentu, iaitu responden mestilah, (a) pekerja perkeranian wanita (b) pernah mengalami
gangguan seksual (c) gangguan seksual berlaku di tempat kerja (d) pernah bekerja
dalam sektor swasta atau badan berkanun (e) berumur melebihi 20 tahun. Mangsa
diwawancara untuk menperolehi data berdasarkan pengalaman mereka.

Penemuan kajian mendedahkan persepsi mangsa, yang merujuk gangguan seksual
sebagai tingkahlaku yang tidak dikehendaki, bersifat seksual dan sensitif, serta
berkaitan gender. Wujud dua tahap kesedaran ditemui, iaitu kesedaran lampau dan kini.
Tiga jenis gangguan yang dikenalpasti mangsa adalah ajakan dan komen lisan serta
mempamer tanpa lisan. Kewujudan peluang, persekitaran yang toleran, sikap
pengganggu dan personaliti mangsa, hubungan kuasa dan gender serta niat terancang
dirujuk sebagai punca gangguan. Mangsa merujuk kesan gangguan meliputi kesan
psikologi, perubahan personaliti, masalah berkaitan kesihatan dan sosial dan
ketidakpuasan hati dalam kehidupan bekerja. Akhirnya, kajian mendapati mangsa
menggunakan beberapa strategi mengupaya untuk menangani gangguan seksual yang
dialami. Ia itu, sokongan sosial, pengupayaan kendiri, melakukan aduan tidak formal

Kajian menghasilkan beberapa implikasi penting. Mangsa menjadi diberdayakan dan pengetahuan mereka terhadap gangguan seksual dipertingkatkan selepas melalui proses temuramah yang akhirnya membina kesedaran terhadap pengalaman gangguan seksual yang dilalui mereka. Dalam bidang perundangan, data kajian menunjukkan makna yang sama dengan "piawai wanita munasabah" yang diguna untuk memutuskan kes di mahkamah. Ini agak unik dan kreatif kerana mahkamah menggunakan piawai orang awam yang munasabah dalam menentukan makna "gangguan seksual". Dalam organisasi, liabiliti lebih besar dikenakan terhadap majikan bagi memastikan tempat kerja bebas daripada amalan gangguan seksual. Kajian masa depan boleh dilakukan kepada pelbagai aspek amalan gangguan seksual seperti dalam bidang sosial, perundangan dan pendidikan. Ini kerana sehingga kini pengkajian berkaitan gangguan seksual ditempat kerja masih sangat terhad di Malaysia.
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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 25 February 2005 to conduct the final examination of Rohani Abdul Rahim on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Sexual Harassment of Female Clerical Workers in the Workplace” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia has been accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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Date: **11 AUG 2005**
DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at UPM or other institutions.

ROHANI BINTI ABDUL RAHIM

Date: 28 May 2005
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